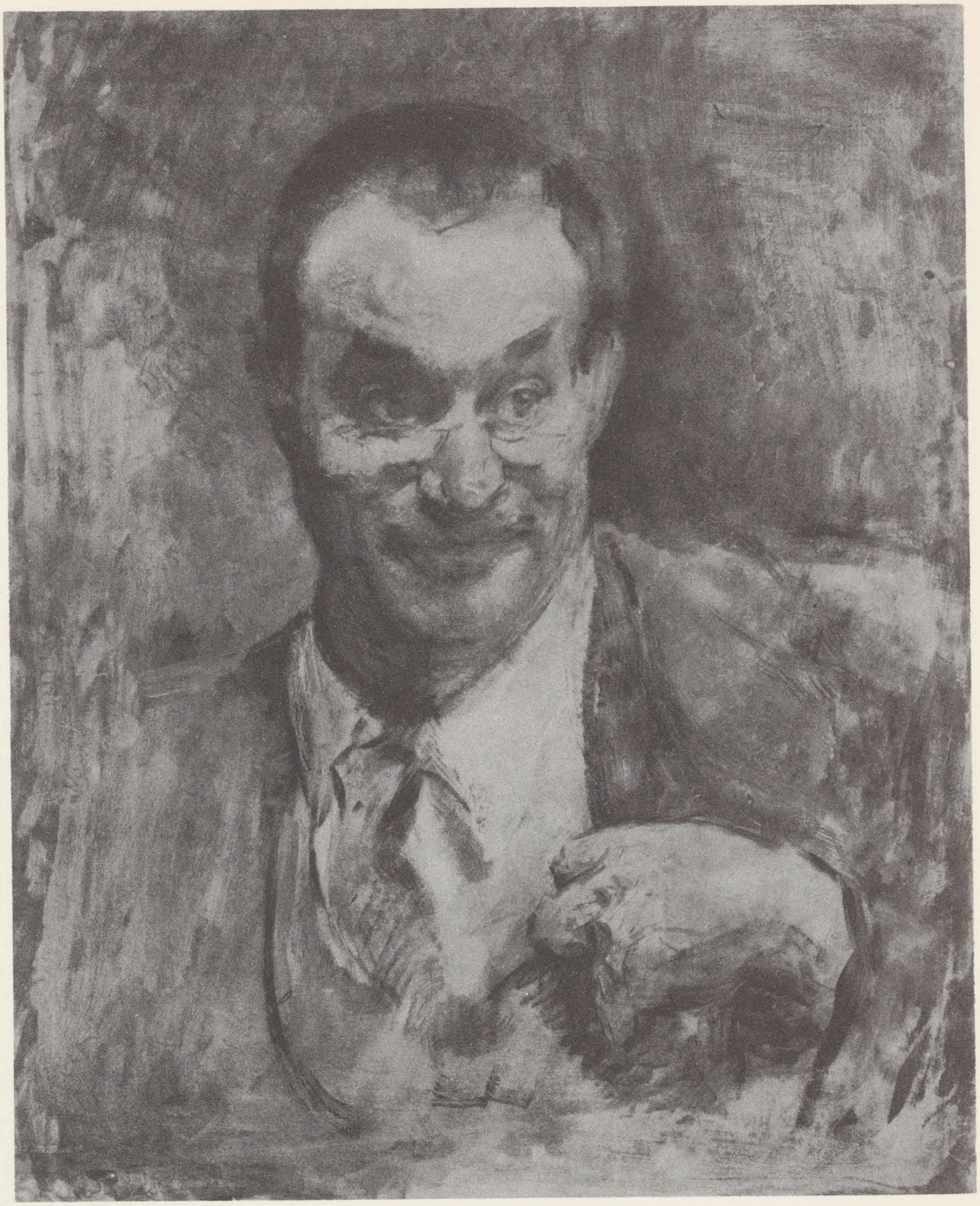
ALEXANDER JAMES

1890 — 1946



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Self Portrait, 1940

MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

ALEXANDER JAMES

1890 — 1946

MANCHESTER, N. H.

THE CURRIER GALLERY OF ART

JULY 15—SEPTEMBER 15, 1947

BOSTON, MASS.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

OCTOBER 15—NOVEMBER 16, 1947

WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

DECEMBER 7—JANUARY 4, 1948

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WICHITA ART MUSEUM	Wichita, Kans.
WILLIAM ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART	Kansas City, Mo.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Barry Faulkner for his foreword to the catalogue, to Mr. W. G. Constable of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for his invaluable advice and assistance in assembling and organizing the material, and particularly to Mrs. Alexander James whose whole-hearted cooperation and tireless efforts have made the exhibition possible.

ALEXANDER JAMES

The Artist

Alexander James was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on December 22, 1890. Son of William and nephew of Henry James, he inherited rich gifts of intellectual and artistic sensibility. Both father and uncle loved and studied painting in their youth, and the family genius, which with them flowered in philosophy and literature, found expression with Alexander in painting. He studied at the School of the Boston Museum and with Abbott Thayer, who first urged him to become a painter and whose influence left an enduring impression upon the younger man.

In 1916 he married Frederika Paine and settled for a time in California, but after two years of portrait orders and landscape painting, he became dissatisfied because he felt his work did not improve and he returned to the more rigorous conditions in New England. He distrusted ease and softness and found fulfillment of spirit in self discipline. This austerity was only one facet of his character and one which he did not impose on others. Friendliness and generosity tempered the expression of his passionate convictions and impulses. A friend wrote of him, "the patientest Impatient Man, the most social Recluse, the most respectful Iconoclast." His wit was piercing, his gaiety infectious and often deceptive for it veiled periods of deep thoughtfulness and profound dejection. James was a man of charm and distinction, but above all he was a compassionate man, who took the problems of others upon himself, and no one asking for help left him empty-hearted.

On their return to the East in 1920 the James family established itself in Dublin, New Hampshire; an old brick house on the village street became the family homestead, and here James farmed and painted, bringing up three vigorous sons. By 1931 the need for self discipline was again upon him. He burned his bridges for the second time, gave up portrait commissions and "went out into the desert." The "desert" was an abandoned farm in the "Pole-Cat" district of Richmond, New Hampshire. It was a lonely spot but one suited to his particular needs. In solitude he faced himself and the problems in painting that he had to solve. He put aside the superficial aspects of portraiture and set himself to portray without compromise, fundamentals of character.

On Friday nights when school was over his wife and boys would make the long, rough drive to Richmond, to be welcomed by big dogs, fires of six-foot logs and Alec's contagious gaiety. With one helper he gradually restored the old farm house until it was sufficiently comfortable for his family to live with him. He made warm friends and companions of his neighbors. Stepping into the Richmond house you might find the "Embattled Farmer" (see catalogue), who was a selectman of Richmond, stripped to his long winter underwear doing the town-accounts in the warm kitchen. Several of James's most striking pictures were painted from this friend whose keen intelligence and innate histrionic talent enabled him to produce the revelation of character for which he sought.

James had his first New York show at the Walker Galleries in 1937. Its success was the result and justification of the Richmond sojourn. Three years later this success was repeated at the same gallery. Now that his feet were firm upon the path he was to travel, he returned to Dublin and resumed painting on commission. Henceforth James's method of painting varied to match the idiosyncracies of his sitter. Sometimes he painted with a passionate directness that was startling in its intensity, at others with a subtlety and wealth of information reminiscent of his uncle's best prose-portraits. He stood four-square in the native American tradition of painting, and while open to fresh influences remained undisturbed by the ripples of European fashion. He was outstanding among his contemporaries for keenness of psychological vision and for the bold and sound technical brilliancy with which he set his vision forth.

In 1941 James's health, never robust, gave grounds for anxiety. His sons were in the service and the world situation depressed him profoundly. After 1944 his health deteriorated sharply, the heart ailment from which he suffered became serious. In spite of illness James continued to paint and embarked on his last great venture. He built for himself the perfect studio. Hitherto he had worked in make-shift studios, now he would have space and light—a plentitude of space and all the light in the universe. He began with the frame of a New England barn which, under the sympathetic hands of his architect, grew into a studio forty feet square, twenty feet to the spring of the rafters and pierced from floor to ceiling with great windows. The proportions were superb, and the room looked as a visitor remarked, "more like a cathedral than a studio."

The neighbors were as keenly interested in the studio as the owner and they brought him wide pine boards, huge beams, whatever they had which might adorn and complete the growing structure. It became a monument of love built by willing hands and by hearts warmed by Alec's nature and the love and understanding he had given the community. The studio was finished late in October and Alexander James died on the following 26th of February, 1946. On the day of the funeral all work was suspended in the village, the stores closed, and crowds who could not get in to the tiny church stood about it in the snow. On his gravestone is carved "Love gave him wings."

Barry Faulkner

ALEXANDER JAMES

The Technician

IN 1925 there was an auction in London. An artist had died, and his pictures were being sold for fabulous sums. A critic sitting next us murmured to himself, "I stand amazed," as he jotted down each figure. But of these canvases, some early ones were darkened, cracked; many of them already had been restored. What might happen to the later masterpieces?

Alec said, "It isn't fair to the poor devil who buys the picture to have it fugitive. The Italian primitives seem as brilliant and whole as on the day they were painted." And so began his interest in the chemistry of paint and the techniques of the old masters.

First he experimented making and toning his own frames, applying the white gesso, red bole, gold leaf, from the written word of fifteenth century Cennino Cennini. With suggestions from Gerome Brush, he painted a few pictures in egg tempera. But soon he was to read and re-read, to make endless marginal notes on the pages of technical volumes. These in time grew into an admirable working collection—Vasari, Moreau-Vauthier, Doerner, Tauber, Toch, the amazing Mrs. Merrifield whose scholarly researches in northern Italy one hundred years ago are still the best of reference books.

In a volume of Eastlake's "Materials for a History of Oil Painting" I found a memorandum of exasperation. "What vehicle to use in *building* the lights. What in glazing the shadows. What in scumbling the lights — How *long* to let the Chiaro-scuro dry!" The search was long and often frustrating.

"These men contradict each other; they contradict themselves in the same book," Alec said. So in London in 1935 he made a respectful pilgrimage to St. John's Wood to ask the learned scholar, Professor A. P. Laurie, for clarification. He returned with the fly leaves of Laurie's book, "The Painter's Methods and Materials" covered with the instructions—given so generously. One wonders if the wording of one formula is the Scotsman's or Alec's. ". . . then 3 oz. whiting to 2 oz. solution, adding this without stirring into a little mountain . . ."

Another evening with Daniel V. Thompson brought more invaluable advice. When we met him by rendezvous in a hotel lobby, he looked so young we could not believe him to be the author of several books written on medieval art.

Whenever he could, Alec painted on mahogany, gesso on one side, fine cradling for support on the other. The cost was never counted if a picture was involved. "It is a pity mine aren't better," he said, "now that they are practically indestructible!"

He left pages of notes, findings, conclusions, which he intended to sift and get into shape. In 1945 he decided at last to paint for himself alone—slow, experimental work. In the new studio he made many lead-ups for the first of these paintings. It was never finished.

By nature he sought the fundamental elements in problems which touched his life. Instinctively he searched for the ultimate significance of reality and that search was never restricted by convention. Emotionally he was guided by a high idealism.

These personal attributes found expression in a perfection of standards which dominated much of his daily life.

As Thornton Wilder wrote of him, "Two of his antecedents have great fame; it is very probable he will have it, but for the present, the great thing he has is his dedication to his own inner light, his *ostinato rigore,* his modesty, which is a pride."

F.J.

CATALOGUE

1. **LANGDON WARNER, 1915**
Red chalk, 17¾ x 14¾ inches
Lent by Langdon Warner, Esq.

Curator of Oriental Art at the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University.

2. **GIRL'S HEAD, 1916**
Red chalk, 15 x 11⅛ inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

3. **PROFESSOR WILLIAM JAMES, 1916**
Red chalk, 14 11/16 x 10 11/16 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The painter's father.

4. **MRS. ALEXANDER JAMES, 1920**
Oil on canvas, 36 x 44 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Frederika James. An example of James's early academic style.
Painted in Washington.

5. **GEORGE PEABODY GARDNER, JR., 1923**
Pencil, 18 x 15½ inches
Lent by George Peabody Gardner, Esq.

6. **PETERBOROUGH HILLS, 1928**
Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
Lent by Mrs. C. C. Pell

7. **CITY HILL—WINTER, 1928**
Oil on canvas, 22 x 26 inches
Lent by Mrs. C. C. Pell

8. **CANDIDE, 1930**
Oil on canvas, 17 x 21 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Boero Candide, a Spanish mystic, who posed in summer that he might meditate in northern Africa in winter. His vehicle, a bicycle; his diet, nuts and fruits. Painted in Paris.

9. **CANDIDE AND WOMAN, 1930**
Charcoal, 18½ x 24½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Study for No. 8.

10. **ANDREE MAUROY, 1930**
Oil on canvas, 29 x 24 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

A Spanish-French dancer, the painter's favorite model. Painted in Paris.

11. **DANNY, 1930**
Oil on panel, 14¼ x 11¼ inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Daniel James, the painter's second son. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

12. **DANNY, 1930**
Pencil, 13¾ x 20½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

13. **JOAN, 1931**
Oil on panel, 29 x 24 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Guy Rutherfurd

Joan deForest Brush Parish, daughter of George deForest Brush.
Painted in Dublin, N. H.

14. **SMALL SON, 1934**
Oil on panel, 18 x 13 inches
Lent by Mrs. Junius S. Morgan, Jr.

Daniel James. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

15. **PORTRAIT OF A PROFESSOR, 1934**
Oil on panel, 17¾ x 13 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Philip Cabot, business man turned teacher, who inspired both students and administrators to work for the nation's welfare. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

16. **TONY BETZ, 1934**
Oil on canvas, 19½ x 23½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

For twenty-five years James's carpenter, farmer and right-hand man, who signed his reports, "Your friend and servant, Anthony Betz."
Painted in Dublin, N. H.

17. **TONY BETZ, 1934**
Pencil and wash, 11 x 14 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Study for No. 16.

18. **NEW HAMPSHIREMAN, 1935**
Oil on panel, 17¼ x 13¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Sam Mason, contractor, farmer, selectman of Marlboro, N. H. Painted in Marlboro.

19. **PHILIP CABOT, 1935**
Oil on masonite, 21½ x 18 inches
Lent by Mrs. Henry Copley Greene

Sketch for a portrait which the painter later destroyed.

20. **HEART OF DARKNESS, 1935**
Oil on panel, 17½ x 12½ inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. C. C. Pell

Sammy, a good houseboy, a superb model. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

21. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1935**
Egg tempera and glazes on panel, 11½ x 8½ inches
Lent by Miss Edith Wetmore

22. **FITZWILLIAM, 1935**
Oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Rodman Schaff, Esq.

Rodman Schaff, a subject whom James delighted to paint. Painted in Fitzwilliam, N. H.

23. **GEORGE deFOREST BRUSH, 1935**
Oil on panel, 15½ x 12½ inches
Lent by the Fogg Museum of Art

Artist and raconteur. As the painter and sitter capped each other's stories, the painter captured only one facet of the sitter's gentle and charming personality. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

24. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1935**
Charcoal, 24½ x 18 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

25. **SELECTMAN OF POLECAT, 1936**
Oil on panel, 18¼ x 14¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. R. H. Carleton

E. Gerry Whitcomb, consulting engineer, who retired to live his days in a remote township, who left it to become a legend of success. "Gone fishing, will be back in a few days", is still tacked on the farm door. Painted in Richmond, N. H.

26. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1936**
Oil on panel, 12 x 9 inches
Lent by Mrs. R. H. Carleton

Painted with two mirrors.

27. **PORTRAIT OF AN ELDER BROTHER, 1936**
Oil on panel, 17½ x 14½ inches
Lent by the Addison Gallery of American Art

An informal study of Henry James, the painter's eldest brother.
Painted in Dublin, N. H.

28. **ALSO OF POLECAT DISTRICT, 1936**
Oil on panel, 13¾ x 10¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

E. G. Whitcomb, whose district was known as "Polecat" in the old Town History. Painted in Richmond, N. H.

29. **POLO PLAYER, 1937**
Oil on panel, 18½ x 14½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Philip Cabot

Michael Phipps, artist and sportsman. Painted in Westbury, Long Island.

30. **MRS. DEAN ACHESON, 1937**
Oil on panel, 26 x 20 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Dean Acheson, Esq.

A talented artist in water color. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

31. **HEAD OF MICHAEL, 1937**
Oil on panel, 15½ x 12¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Michael James, the painter's third son at fourteen.
Painted in Dublin, N. H.

32. **SIBERIAN COSSACK, 1937**
Oil on panel, 24 x 20 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Gouri Ivanov-Rinov, son of P. P. Ivanov-Rinov, Ataman of Siberian Cossacks, and an artist. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

33. **TONY'S BROTHER, 1937**
Oil on panel, 12 x 9 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

John Betz. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

34. **TONY'S BROTHER, 1937**
Pencil, 25¼ x 19¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Study for No. 33.

35. **BLACK BOY, 1937**
Oil on panel, 16 x 12¾ inches
Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Sammy. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

36. **DRINKERS, 1937**
Pastel, 19½ x 23½ inches.
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

37. **A SOLITARY, 1938**
Oil on panel, 24 x 17¾ inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

John Betz, who lived with his six cats. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

38. **A SOLITARY, 1938**
Charcoal, 21¼ x 29¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Study for No. 37.

39. **TAX COLLECTOR, 1938**
Pastel, 25½ x 31⅜ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

40. **MORNING, 1938**
Pastel, 17⅛ x 21 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

41. **FOUR MEN, 1938**
Pastel, 21½ x 27½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

42. **CANTHOOK, 1938**
Pastel, 13½ x 19¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

43. **SELECTMEN, 1938**
Pastel, 20 x 26 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Edward Thaw

44. **YOUNG MOTHER, 1939**
Oil on masonite, 18 x 13¼ inches
Lent by Paul W. Lehmann, Esq.

Mrs. Paul W. Lehmann, wife of the headmaster of The Dublin School. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

45. **PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S WIFE, 1939**
Oil on panel, 20½ x 17¾ inches. Illustrated
Lent by the Wichita Art Museum

Frederika James. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

46. **ROMAN HOLIDAY, 1939**
Oil on panel, 22 x 18 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Philip Rocca, stonecutter, for whom each day was a gala. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

47. **EMBATTLED FARMER, 1939**
Oil on panel, 24 x 19¾ inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

E. G. Whitcomb doing the town accounts. Painted in Richmond, N. H.

48. **EMBATTLED FARMER, 1939**
Pastel, 25½ x 31½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Study for No. 47.

49. **OLD HUNTER, 1939**
Oil on panel, 26 x 20 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

"Ike" Beaulieu, Canadian gardener, who lived in a small cabin on the Harrisville Road. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

50. **FORGOTTEN CABIN, 1939**
Oil on masonite, 18 x 24 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

51. **TOWN MEETING, 1939**
Pastel, 25⅝ x 31⅝ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

52. **TONY ASLEEP, 1939**
Oil and pastel on canvas, 25¼ x 25¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

53. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1940**
Oil on panel, 21 x 17 inches. Frontispiece
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James
Unfinished study. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

54. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1940**
Pencil, 11 x 8 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James
Study for No. 53.

55. **PORTRAIT OF A YOUTH, 1940**
Oil on panel, 26¼ x 20¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. Henry James
Daniel James. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

56. **SMALL SELF, 1940**
Oil on panel, 12¼ x 9¼ inches
Lent by Mrs. S. Parker Bremer

57. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1940**
Oil on panel, 23½ x 17¾ inches
Lent by J. F. Seiberling, Esq.

58. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1940**
Charcoal, 24¼ x 19⅛ inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Study for No. 57.

59. **LUTHER SMITH, 1941**
Oil on panel, 36¼ x 30 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Cobbler and socialist philosopher who lived in a cabin so small that when he wished to spit into the stove, the artist, palette and easel had to move outdoors. Painted in Hancock, N. H.
Thornton Wilder wrote: "The picture grows more searching, beautiful and true the more one looks at it. I keep thinking how deep it is in truth and yet how sovereignly it avoids the thing which the painter's father warned his students against: the merely abject truth."

60. **BREAD AND WINE, 1941**
Oil on panel, 36 x 30 inches
Lent by J. F. Seiberling, Esq.

Philip Rocca, a bon-vivant made game warden as a protective measure against his own arts. Painted in Milford, N. H.
Awarded the Popular Prize in the 18th Biennial Exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

61. **SELF PORTRAIT, 1942**
Red chalk, 21 x 16 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

62. **DANIEL JAMES, 1942**
Oil on panel, 30 x 25 inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James
After Murmansk: February—May 1942. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

63. **MICHAEL JAMES, 1942**
Oil on panel, 21 x 17¾ inches
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

64. **SANDY, 1942**
Oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18 inches. Illustrated
Lent by the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
Alexander Robertson James, the painter's eldest son.
Painted in Dublin, N. H.

65. **DOWN TO EARTH, 1943**
Oil on panel, 40 x 30 inches
Lent by the Upjohn Collection
A friend painted in the shed of his greenhouse.
Painted in Fitzwilliam, N. H.

66. **CHOOSE YOUR PARTNER, 1943**
Oil on panel, 30 x 25 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

Albert D. Quigley, a devoted companion in painting and in the making of frames. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

67. **JOHN P. MARQUAND, 1944**
Oil on panel, 36 x 30 inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. John P. Marquand

A versatile author whose generous wit enlivened the sittings and gave ease and comfort to the painter. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

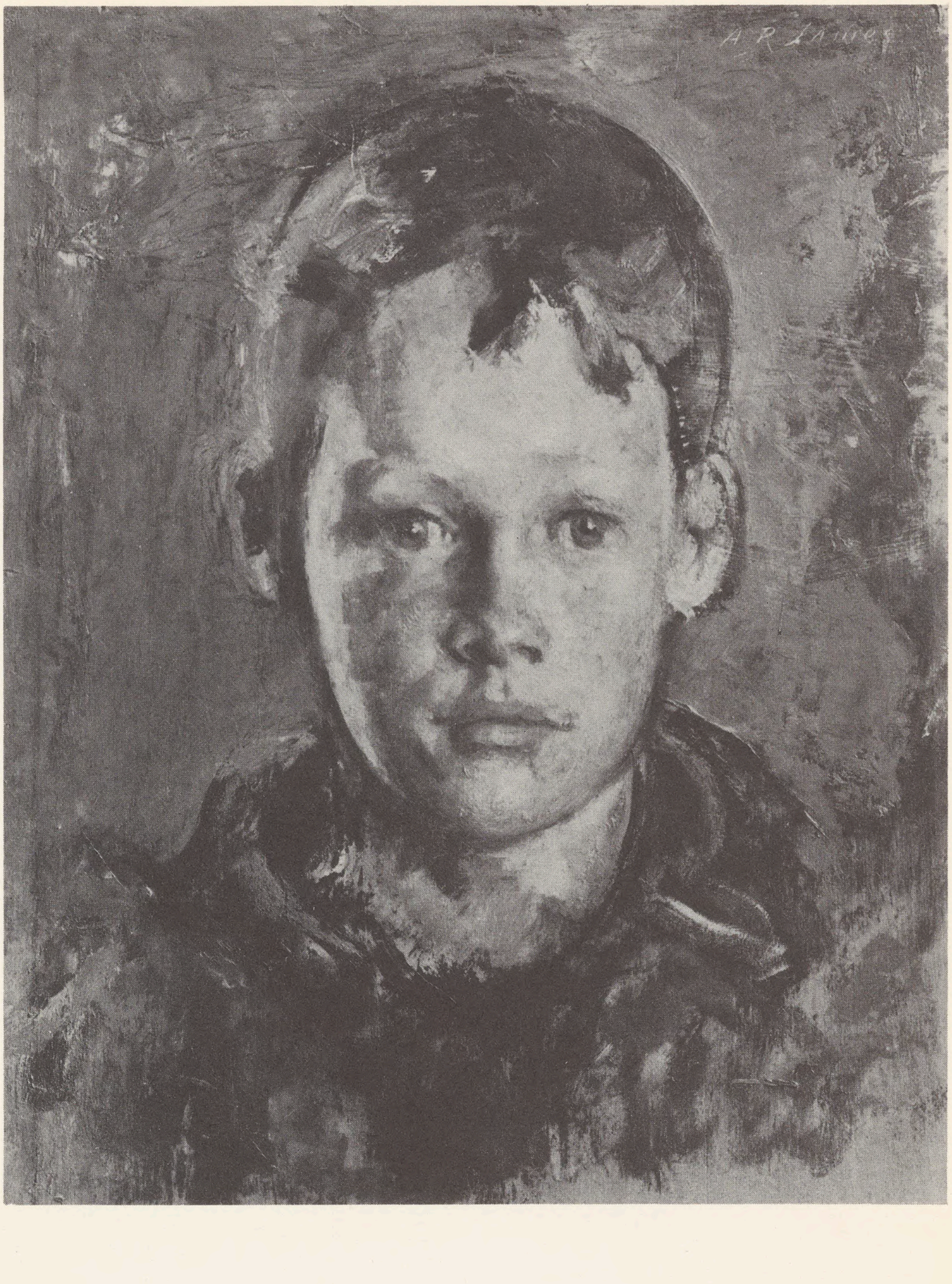
68. **AUTUMN SKETCH, 1944**
Oil on canvas, 20½ x 24¾ inches
Lent by Mrs. Henry James

69. **DR. JAMES L. GAMBLE, 1945**
Oil on panel, 39½ x 29½ inches
Lent by the Children's Hospital, Boston

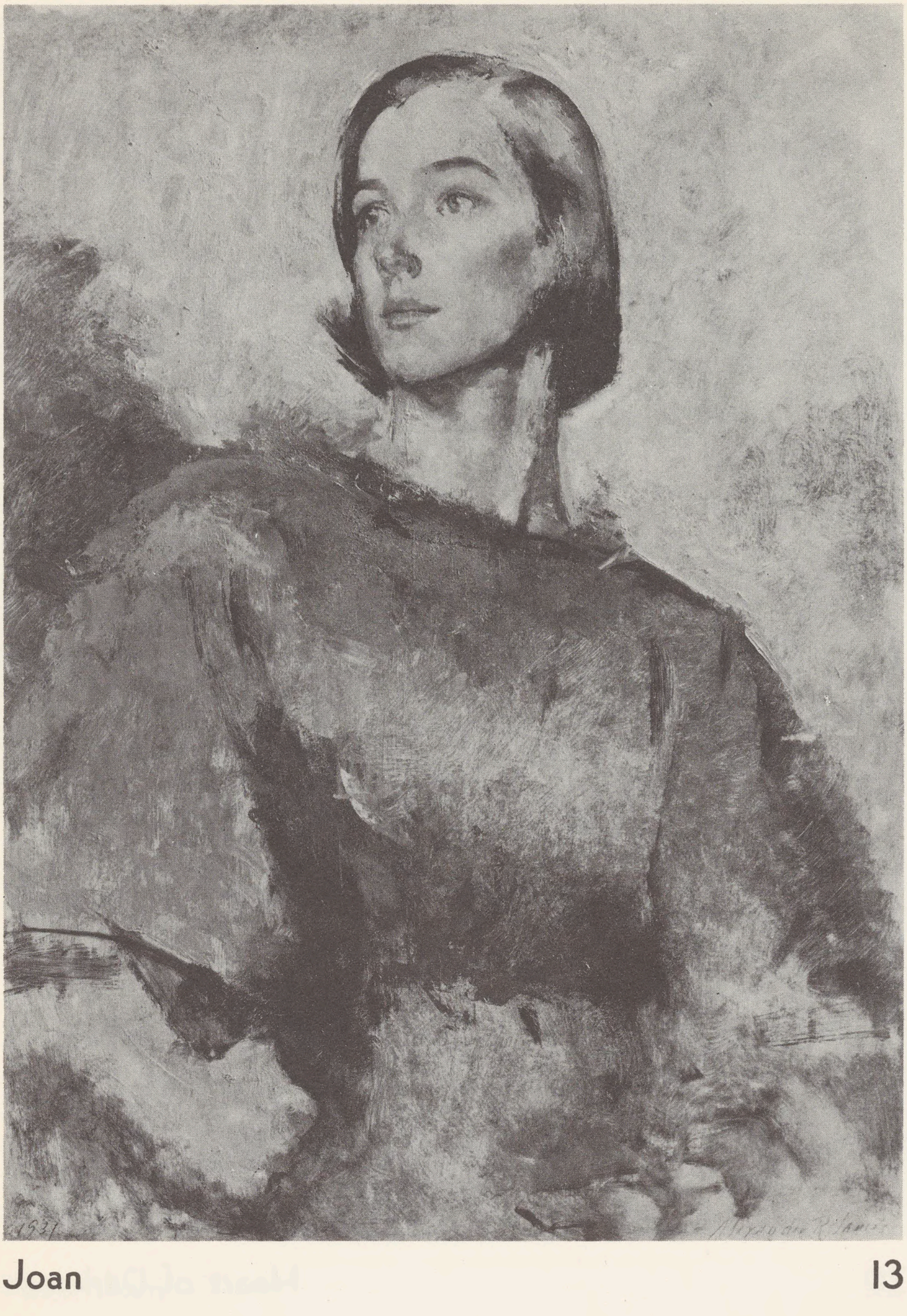
Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School, and physician to the Children's Hospital. Painted in Dublin, N. H.

70. **FREDERIKA JAMES, 1945**
Red chalk, 25⅜ x 19⅜ inches. Illustrated
Lent by Mrs. Alexander James

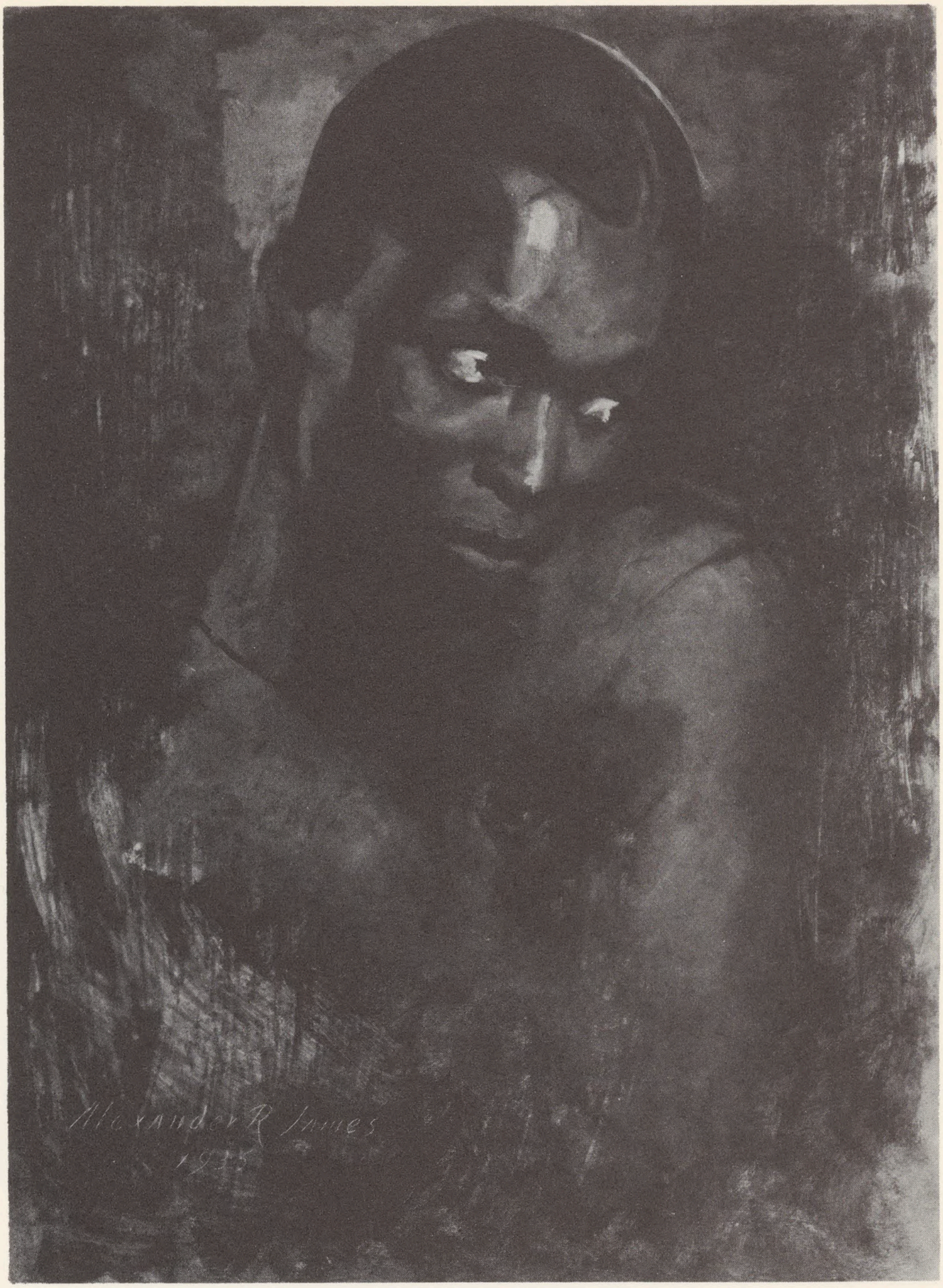
ILLUSTRATIONS



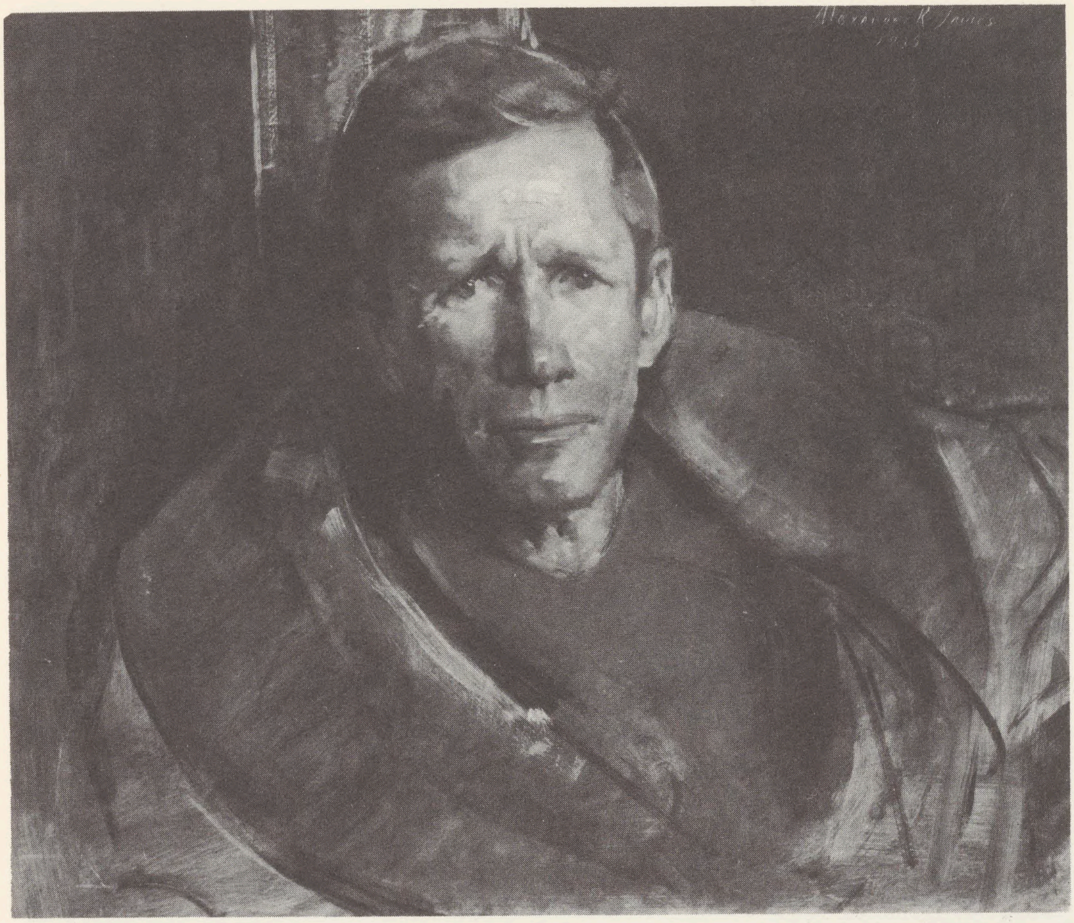
11 Danny



Joan

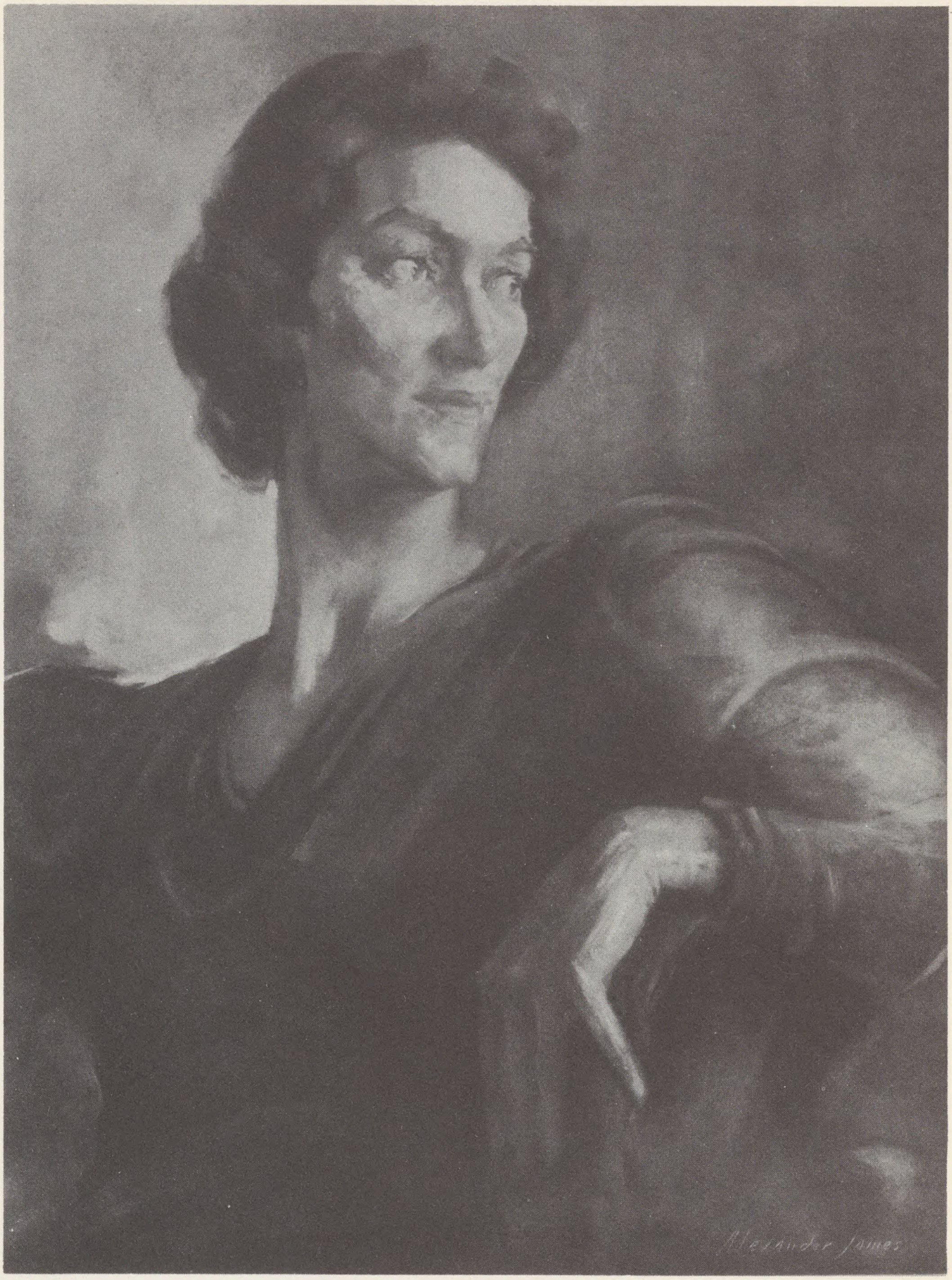


20 Heart of Darkness

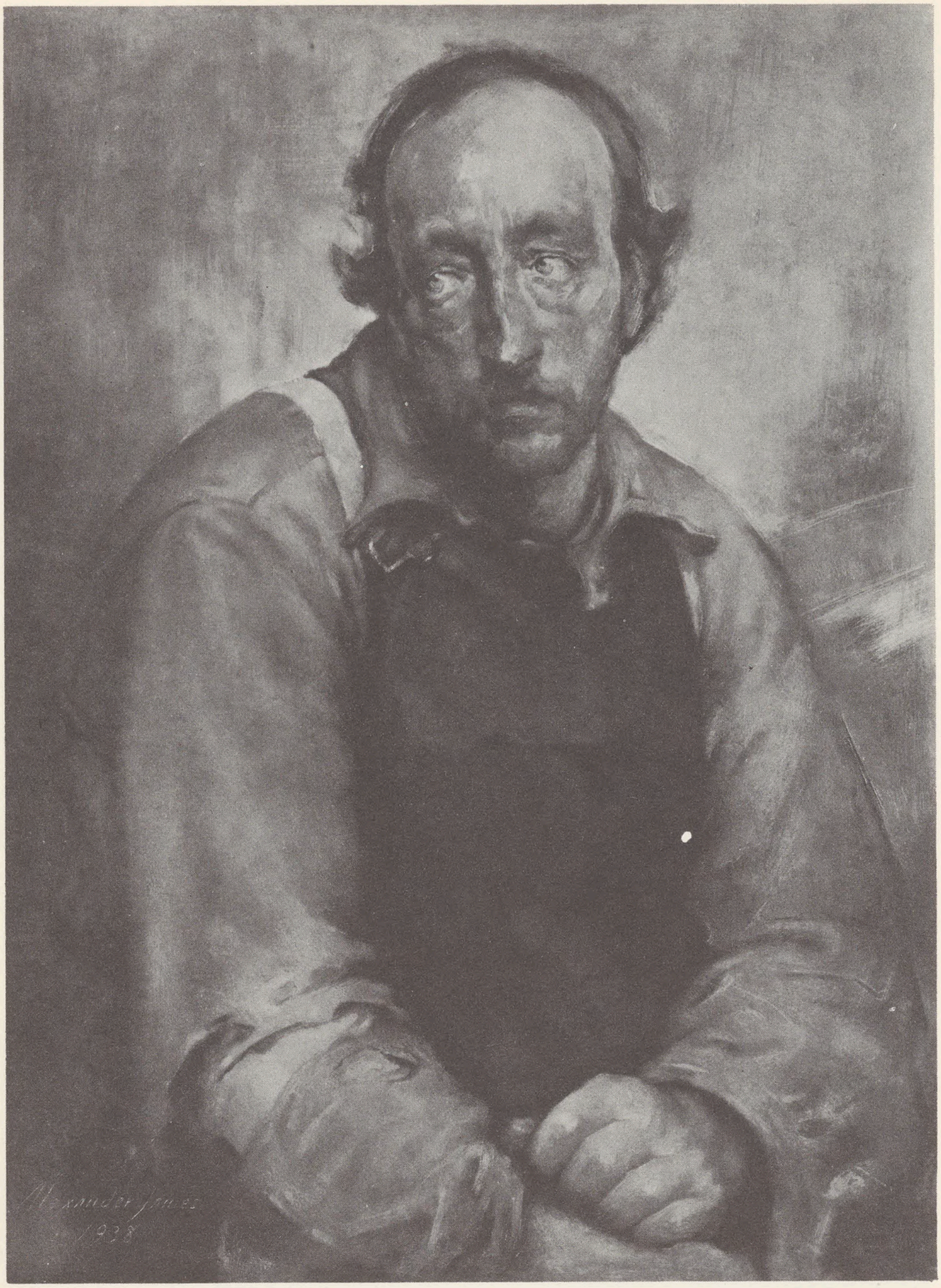


Fitzwilliam

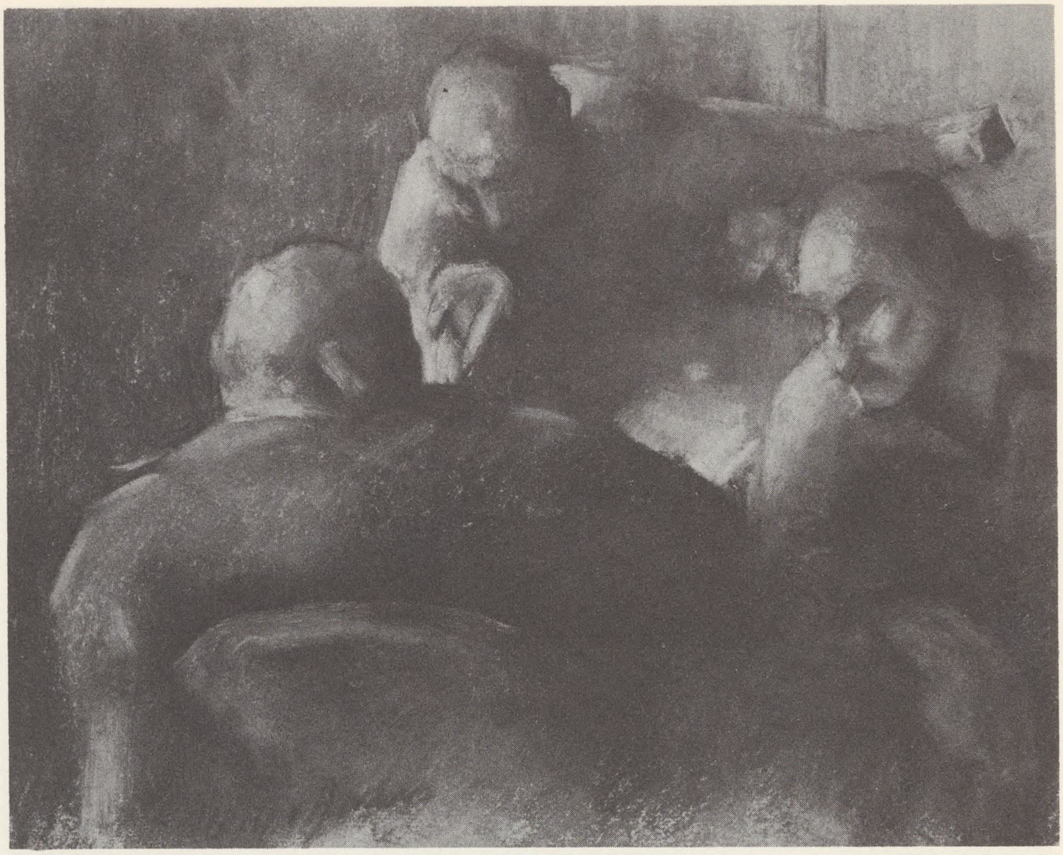
22



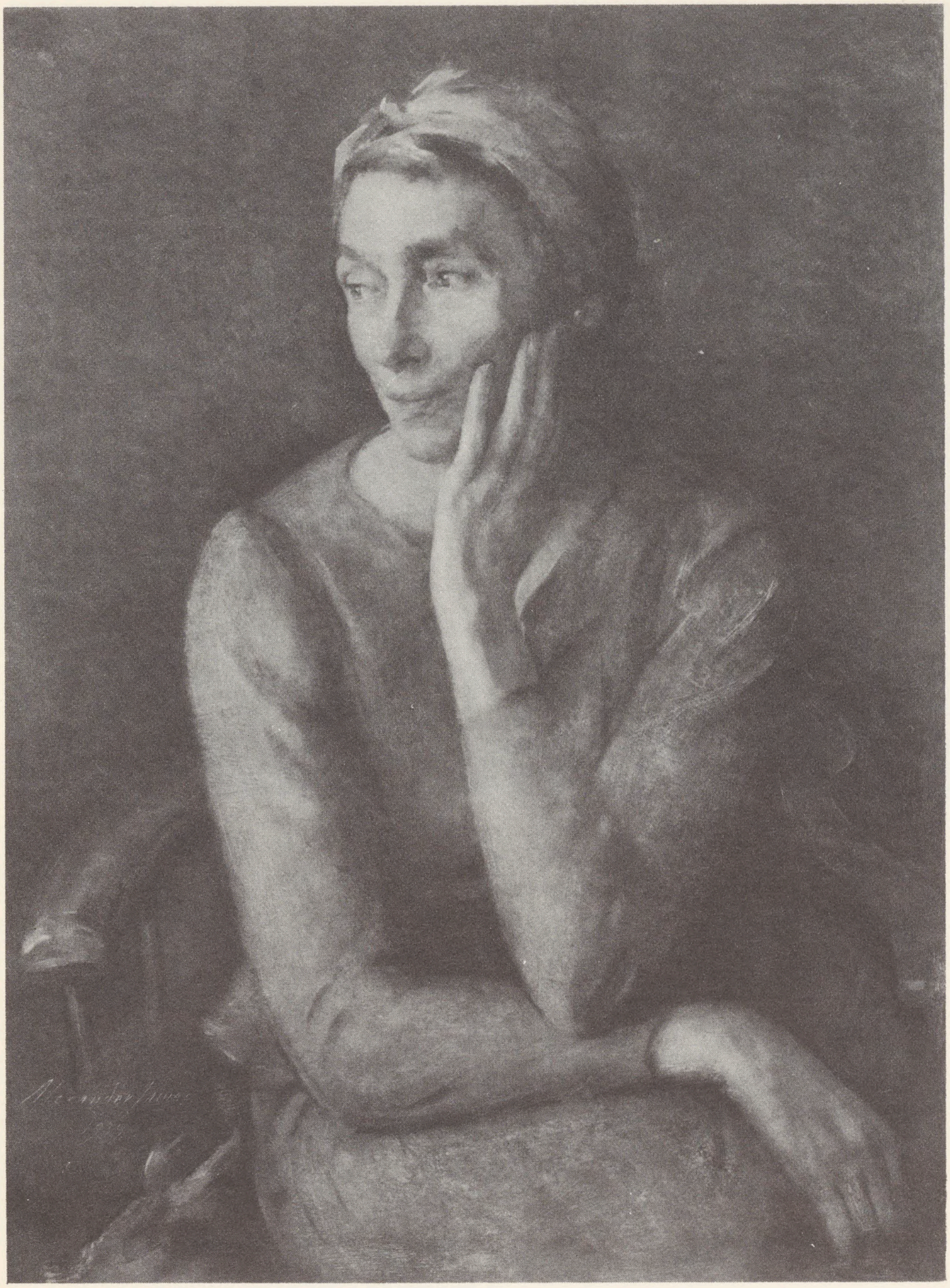
30 Mrs. Dean Acheson



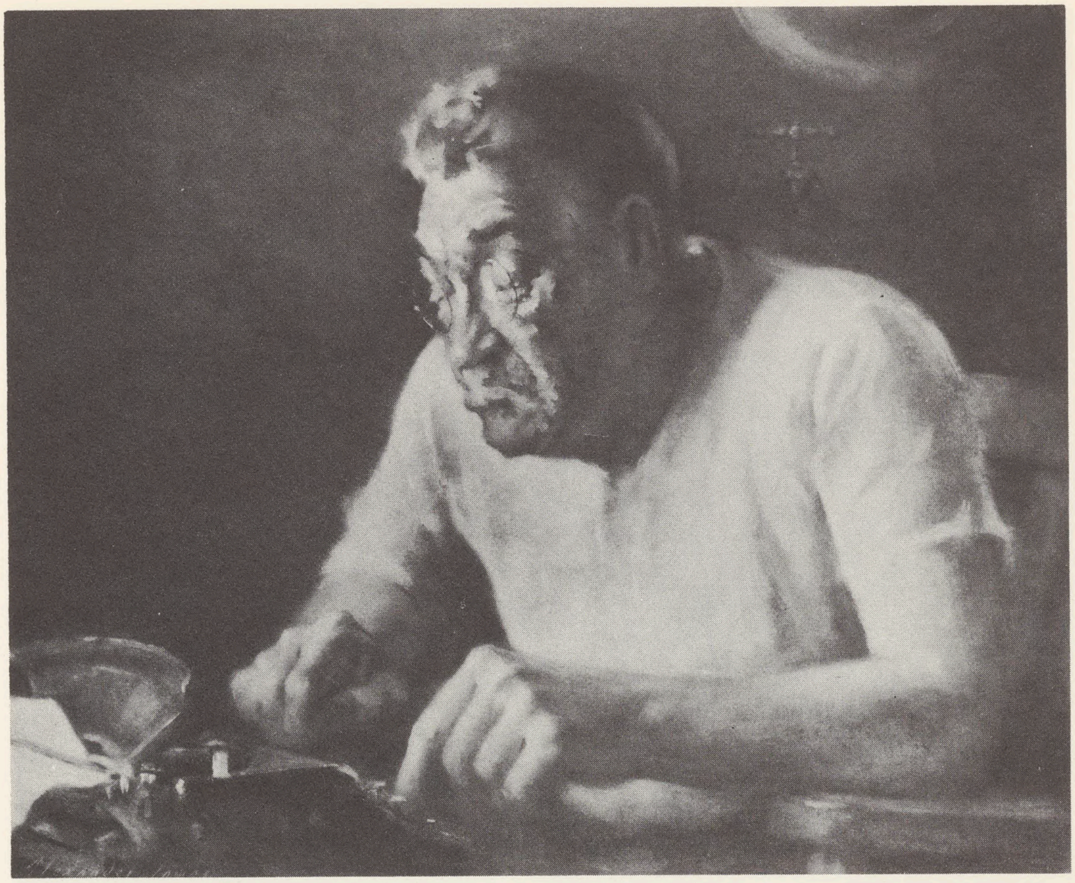
A Solitary



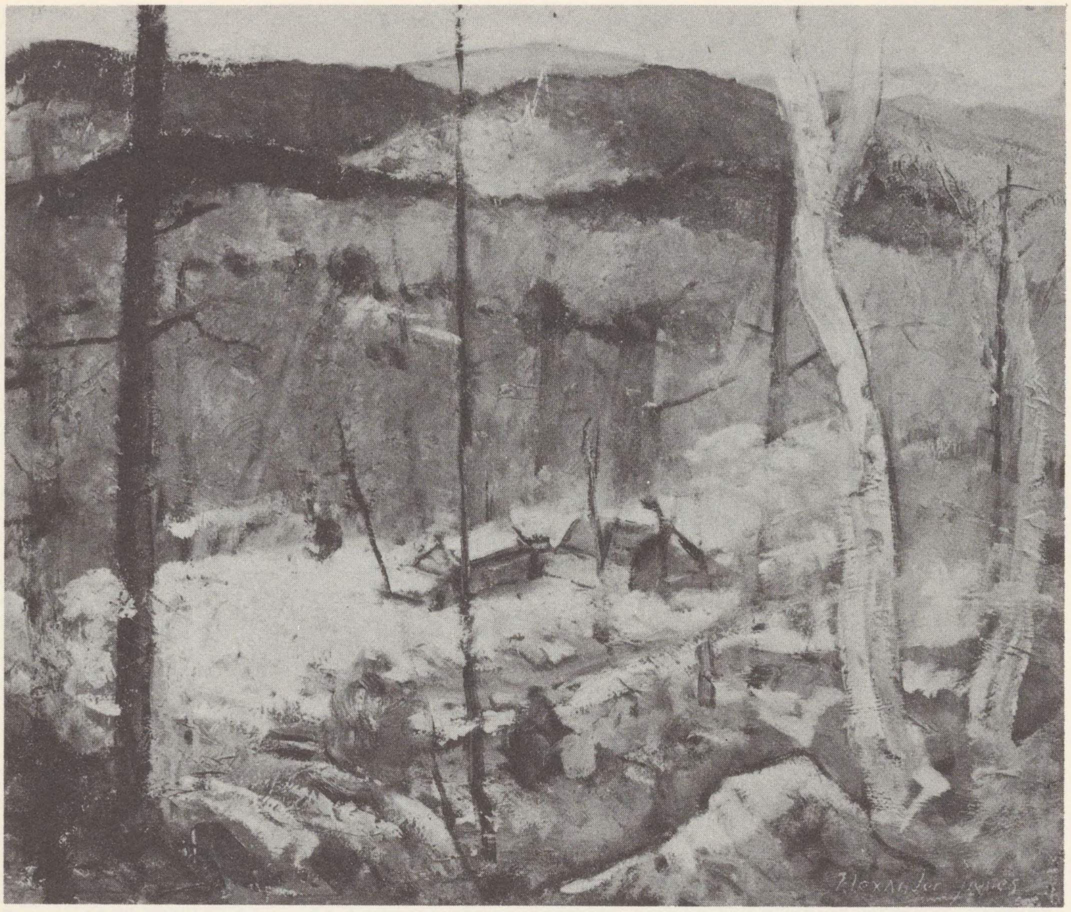
43 Selectmen



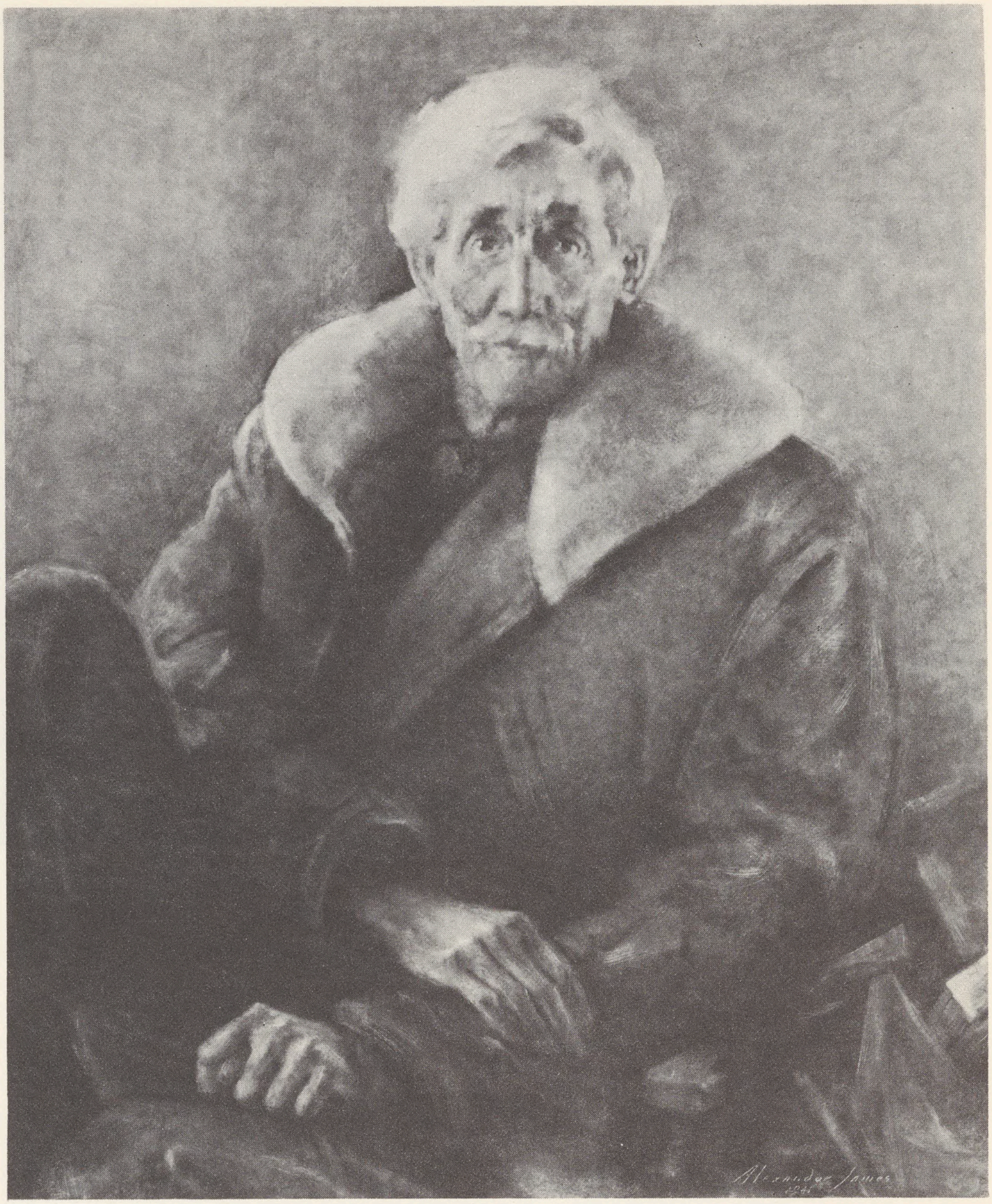
Portrait of the Artist's Wife



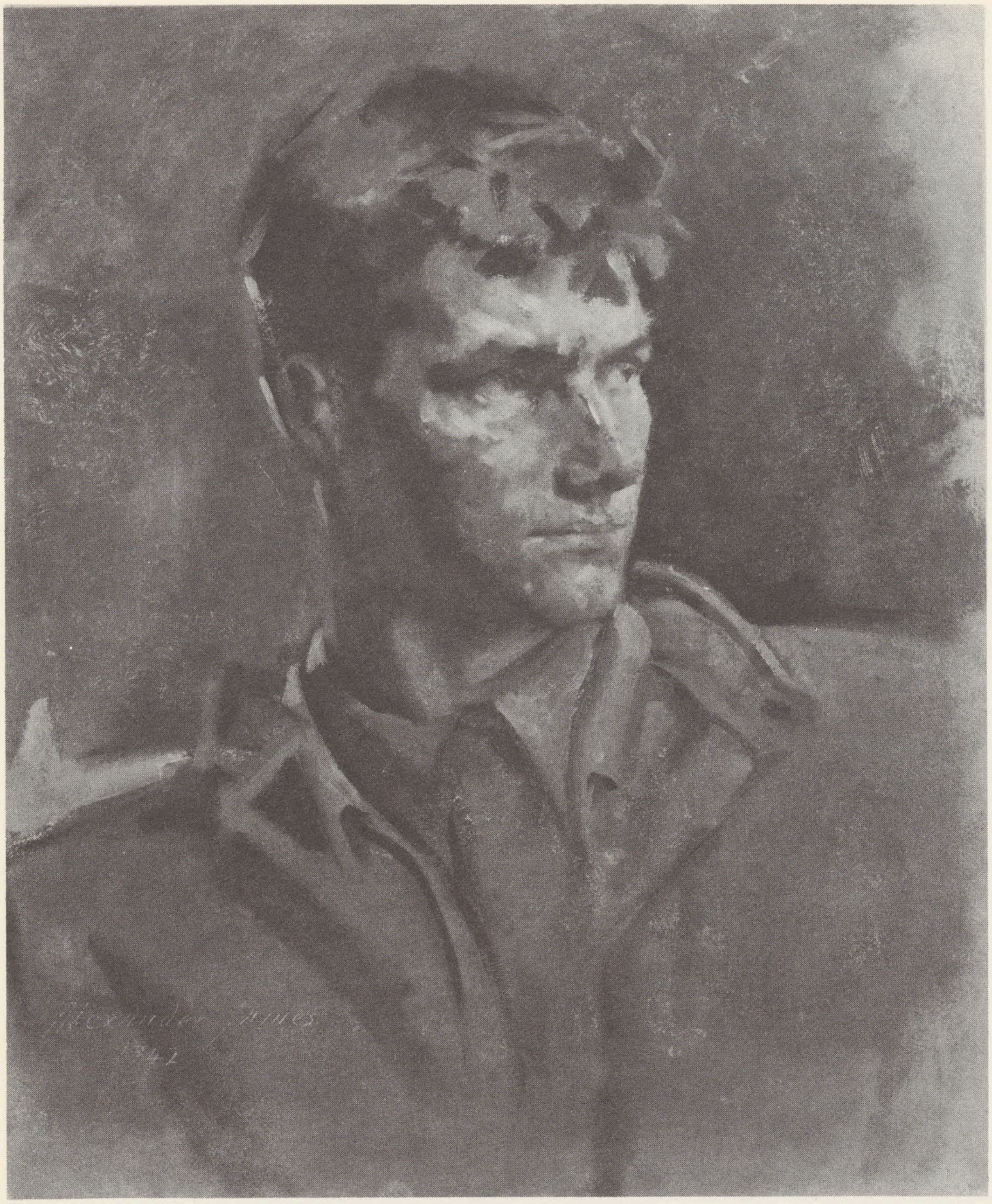
47 Embattled Farmer



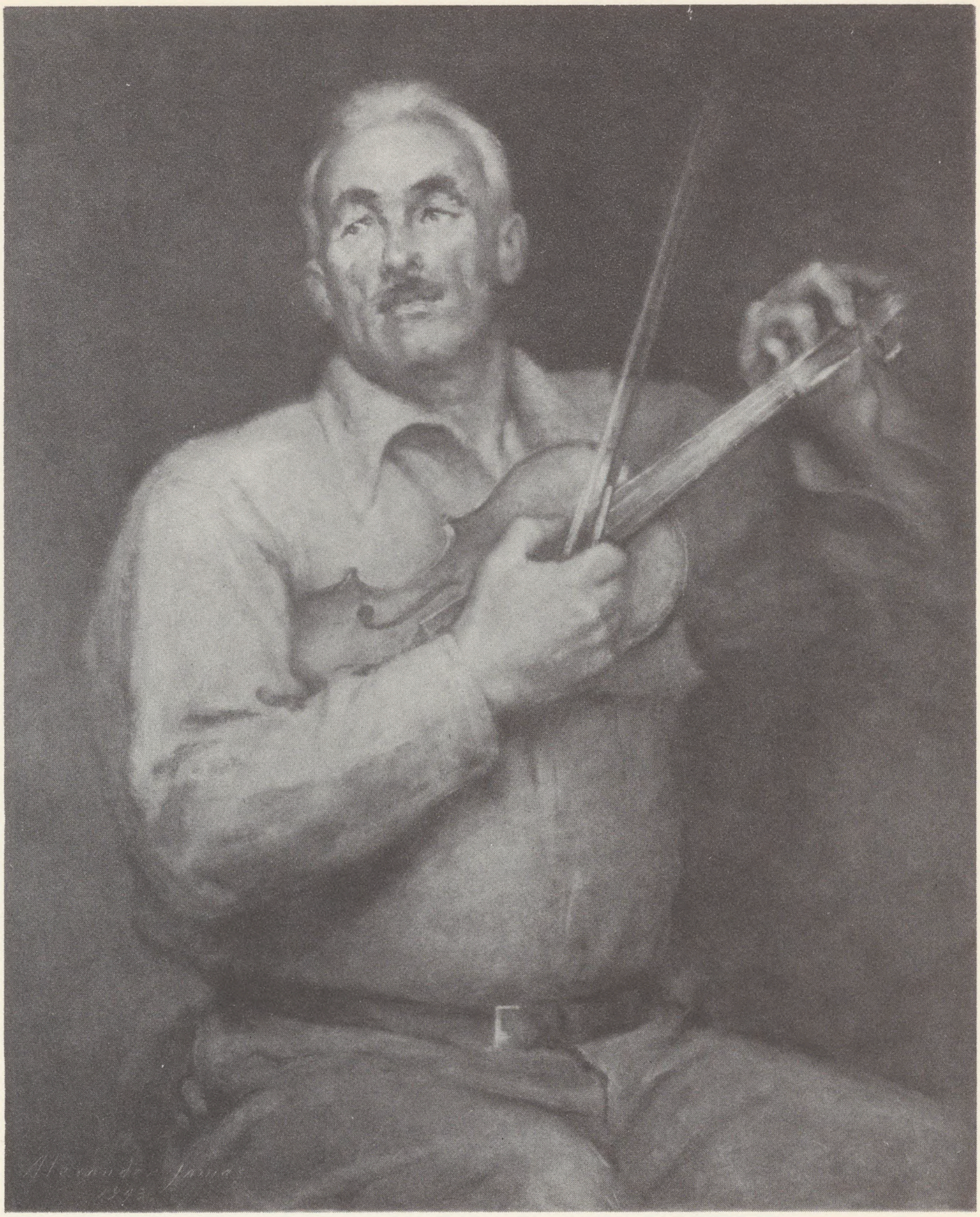
Forgotten Cabin 50

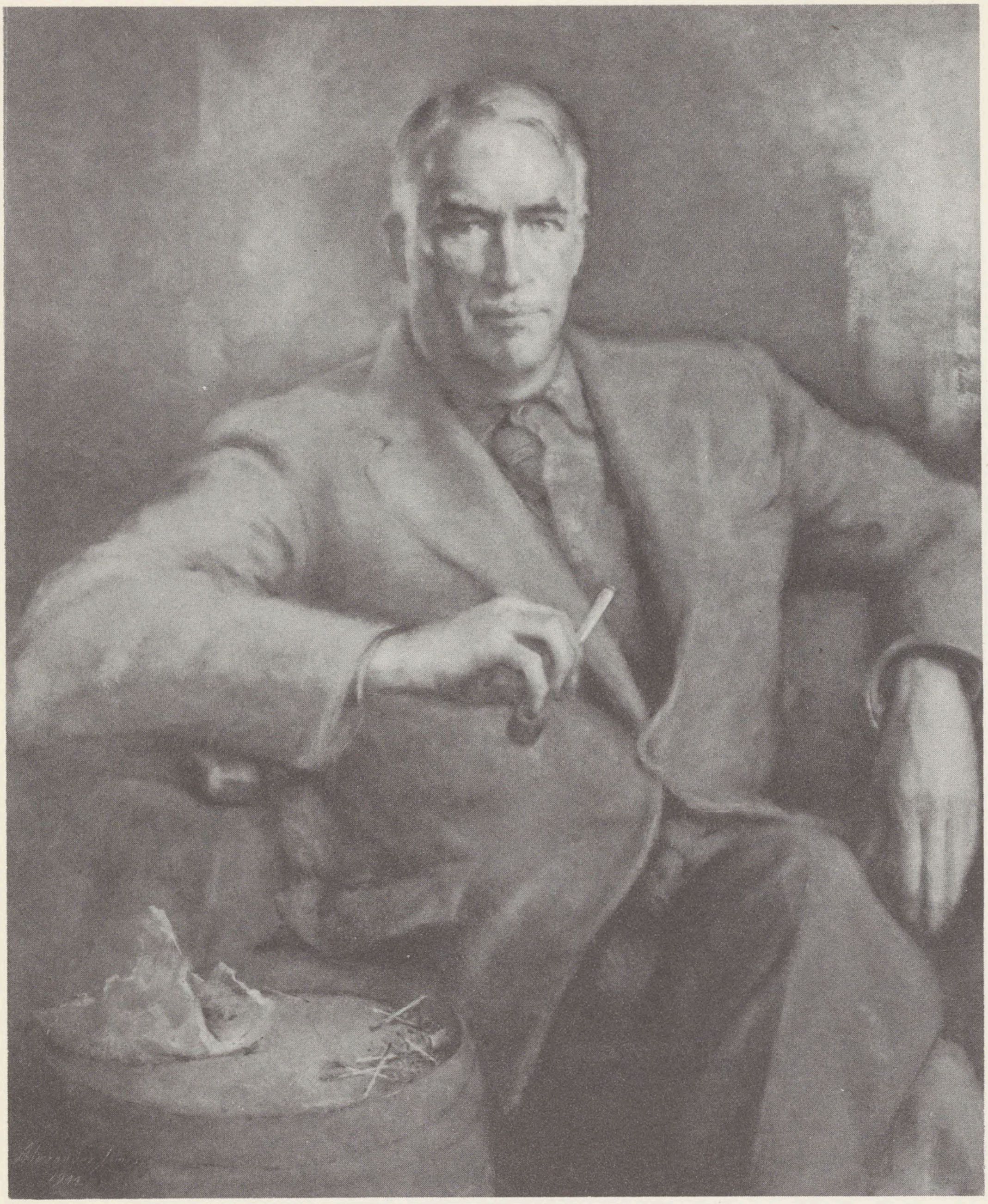


59 **Luther Smith**

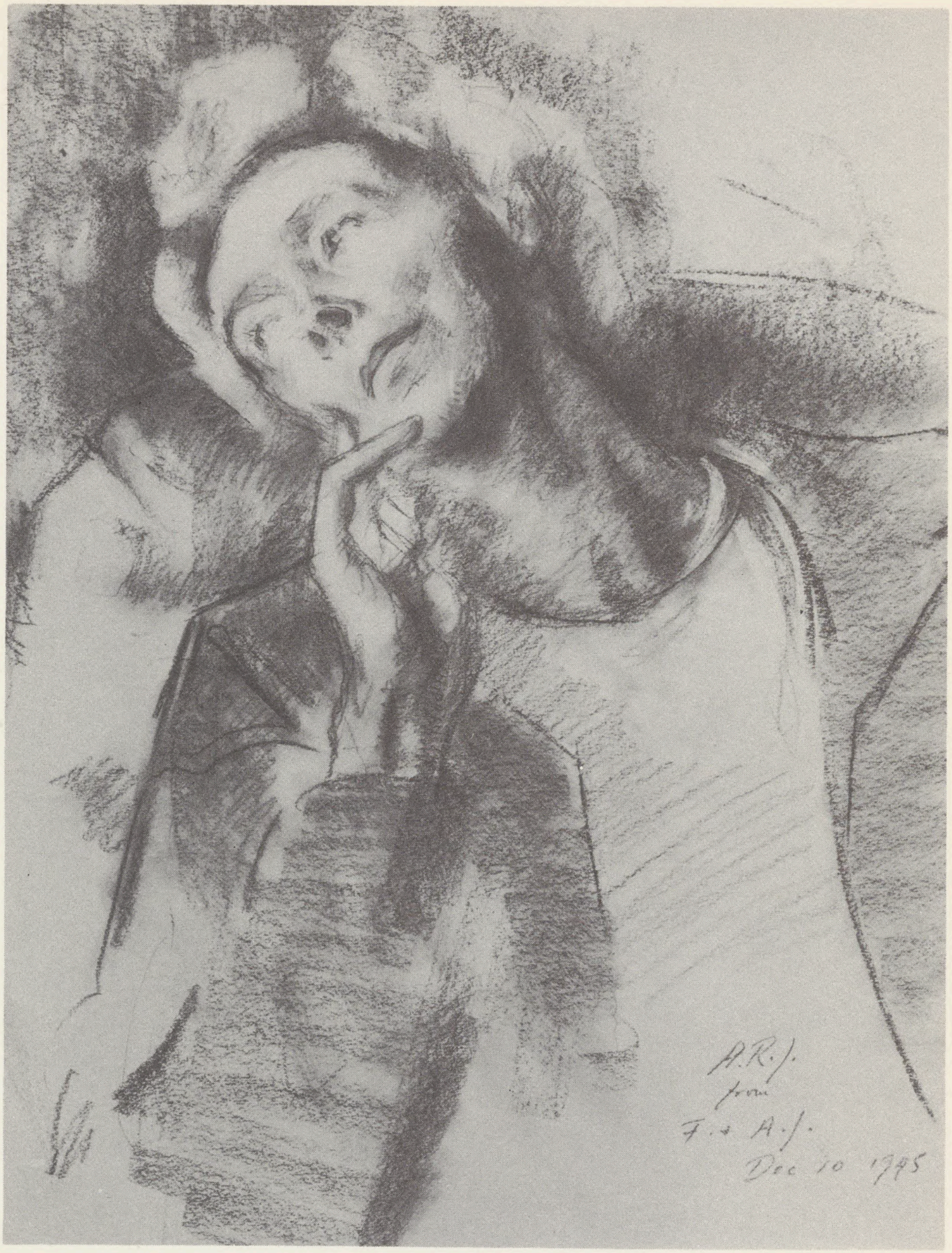


Sandy 64





John P. Marquand


A.R.J.
from
F. + A.J.
Dec 10 1945

70 Frederika James